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Agriculture

Forest  
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File Code: 3420  
Route To:

Date: August 31, 2007

Subject: Mesa Poleo Forest Health Projects, Coyote RD

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

On August 22, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Andy Vigil (SFNF westside silviculturist), Ruben Leal (Coyote RD), and Tony Barela (Coyote RD) to examine some recently completed, ongoing, and proposed thinning units in the Mesa Poleo project area.

At this time, about 200 of the 300 acres included in the FY 2007 bark beetle prevention project area (see our 3420 letter of July 19, 2006) had been treated by a District thinning crew. Implementation has been somewhat different than initially proposed: the planned viga sales prior to the thinning of the smaller diameter trees were not implemented. Instead, the thinning crew has been felling all excess trees (up to the diameter limit of 16"). In some portions of the treatment area, a commercial operator has been moving and decking the larger-diameter stems.

Overall, the thinning crew has been doing a good job selecting leave-trees. Target basal areas of 40 to 80 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre are being achieved in most areas. In last year's report, we recommended retaining more young trees--primarily within existing sapling-size groups--to encourage development of an additional age class. We were pleased to see that this has been achieved in a few areas, but in other areas most of the young trees had been cut.



**An area where more young trees could have  
been retained**

Retaining more young trees by using closer spacing within these groups will help account for natural attrition and promote better growth form. These small trees contribute very little to basal area, and since they occur in only a small proportion of the total acreage, their overall effect

on fire behavior seems minimal. Retaining more young trees is also compatible with the goshawk guidelines. In some portions of the treatment area, Gambel oak thickets had been thinned; we question this practice, since it may actually encourage spread of this species.



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A large area (405 acres) directly south of this year's project area was examined as a potential project site for FY 2008. Stands here are multi-storied ponderosa pine, and similar to those treated the past three years for bark beetle prevention. Most of this area was pre-commercially thinned 25 to 30 years ago. Current basal areas range from about 90 to 150 ft<sup>2</sup> in most areas. Site indices generally range from about 65 to 80, with habitat types inter-grading between pine-oak and pine-bunchgrass. The southeastern corner of this area is a young (20-25 year old) plantation in an old burn; we agreed that this area, as well as some adjacent area to the north, do not require treatment at this time. After excluding these portions, we agreed to propose treatment of 290 acres here for bark beetle prevention (possibly cost-shared with Fuels) in FY 2008.

Somewhat unexpectedly, earlier this week we were able to provide late FY 2007 funding for treatment of 183 acres within this area (a map has been prepared by Andy), under an existing IDIQ contract. The prescription calls for thinning trees up to 16" dbh, retaining basal areas of 40 to 80 ft<sup>2</sup>, similar to recent projects in the Mesa Poleo wildland-urban interface. Although this area would be treated primarily by machine mastication, it appears that efforts will be made to cut and deck some of larger material for utilization by the community.

Please contact Dave Conklin at 842-3288 if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ *Debra Allen-Reid*  
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